

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, HUMAN
SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE, URGING RESTORATION OF
HOMELESS YOUTH FUNDING**

March 4, 2011

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a private, non-profit legal organization based at the University of Connecticut School of Law. The Center provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. I am an attorney at the Center and the Director of the Center's Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic, which provides legal services to teens throughout the state. In addition, I am the chair of the Connecticut Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth,¹ a statewide group of professionals interested in improving access to services and supports for runaway and homeless youth in the state of Connecticut. The Team is comprised of state agencies including the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Court Support Services Division, and the State Department of Education, as well as private providers throughout the state including The Center for Children's Advocacy, The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, RYASAP, CT Coalition to End Homelessness, True Colors, Kids in Crisis as well as others.

I write today to urge you to restore the one million dollars of funding for the Homeless Youth Program. The Center is urging this restoration because it will provide critical support to a growing homeless youth population during tough economic times- the time they need it most. In other words, the time is now.



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Homeless Youth in CT Desperately Need These Services

We call homeless youth "the invisible population" in this state. This is because even though we have a growing number of homeless youth, there is very little known about these kids in Connecticut. They are invisible because:

- there is little data on this population
- there are few services for this population
- there is little coordination between a multitude of systems and agencies serving this population
- there is little awareness of this population in Connecticut

Who are Connecticut's homeless youth? They are youth who come into the care of DCF due to abuse or neglect and then runaway from DCF care. They are also youth who *refuse*

¹ The Connecticut Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth was convened in the summer of 2008 in response to a request by the American Bar Association's Committee on Homelessness and Poverty as well as the National Network for Youth that each state bring together advocates to affect systemic change on behalf of runaway and homeless youth.

services from DCF. They are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth who have been kicked out of their homes after “coming out”, adolescent boys who are not allowed into family homeless shelters, and youth who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth states that parental abuse and neglect is a primary cause of homelessness among unaccompanied youth (homeless youth who are on their own).² The National Network for Youth estimates that according to studies of a homeless youth sample, 33% had been in foster care, 51% had been physically abused, and 60% of girls and 23% of boys had been sexually abused.³

In Connecticut, we know that Connecticut schools reported a 34 percent increase in the number of homeless students, from 2,017 to 2,716, over the past two years.⁴ One program in New Haven projected to serve 250 homeless youth in 2010, solely from the Greater New Haven area.⁵ We also know that the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Management and Information System reported a total of 270 runaway and homeless youth in Connecticut for fiscal year 2009/10.⁶ Lastly, we also understand that DCF has identified over 65 cases of youth involved in domestic minor sex trafficking (also called prostitution). These youth are most often youth who have runaway or are homeless, and most of them have run from DCF care.⁷ (Please see data attached.)

The General Assembly Specifically Approved a Bill to Address These Needs Less Than One Year Ago

Public Act 10-179 Secs. 28-30 was passed last year to address the need for services for this population. The Act defined homeless youth, and named DCF as the agency to provide a host of interventions including public outreach to homeless youth, respite housing (emergency beds), and transitional living services. Attached to these provisions was a mere one million dollars to set up appropriate programming. As such, DCF worked hard with input from the CT Team on Runaway and Homeless youth to design a program that would efficiently use this money to provide critical services. DCF issued a Request for Proposals, contracts were awarded, and the programming was about to start. Then, the funding was suspended.

It was suspended despite the fact that CT passed a bill last year emphasizing the importance of reducing human and fiscal costs of the recession, including youth runaways and homelessness.⁸ It was suspended despite the fact that the numbers of homeless youth have increased. It was suspended despite the fact that the Commissioner of DCF asked

² “Using What We Know: Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth.” 39, Julianelle, Patricia, The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, February 2008, available at http://www.naehcy.org/dl/uwwk_youth.pdf.

³ “Unaccompanied Youth: Fast Facts” National Network for Youth, citing YouthCare, Inc., 1998, available at http://www.nn4youth.org/media/factsheets/FactSheet_Unacompanied_Youth.pdf.

⁴ CT State Department of Education, Louis Tallarita, Homeless Education Coordinator, December 2010.

⁵ Youth Continuum, conversation with Executive Director Carole Shomo, December 2010.

⁶ This number is believed to be a far underestimate of the total number of homeless youth in CT as it only includes reports from grantees of a national grant to work with runaway and homeless youth.

⁷ Testimony of Barbara Claire, CT Department of Children and Families, before the Select Committee on Children, March 1, 2011.

⁸ PA 10-179 Sec 1(b).

that it not be. Lastly, it was suspended despite the fact that now is the time they need our help the most. Yes, we have to make hard choices and these are hard times. But we cannot balance the budget on the backs of homeless youth.

As such, I write today to urge you to restore the one million dollars of funding for the Homeless Youth Program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stacey Violante Cote". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Attorney Stacey Violante Cote, Director
Teen Legal Advocacy Clinic
Chair, CT Team on Runaway and Homeless Youth

How many runaway and homeless children and youth are in Connecticut? *We still don't know!*

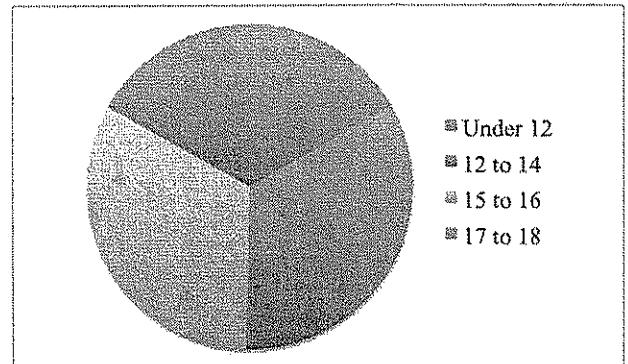
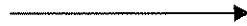
What **DO** we know?

National Runaway and Homeless Youth

Management Information System (RHYMIS)

09/10 FY Total Youth in Youth Shelters: 270

Male: 114
Female: 156
<12 years: 45
12-14 years: 90
15-16 years: 88
17-18 years: 45



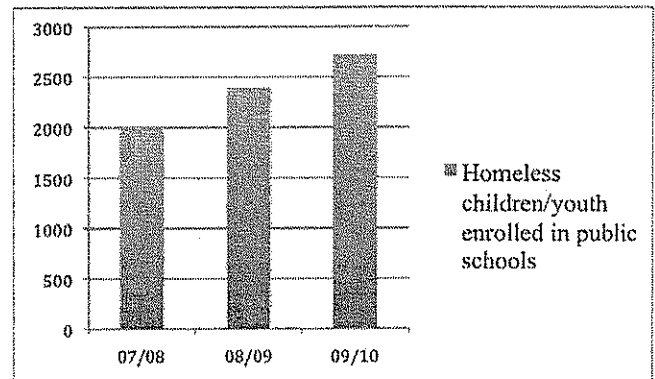
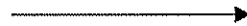
09/10 FY Total Street Outreach Contacts: 6188

CT Department of Education

Homeless children/youths enrolled in public school

2009-10 School Year Total: 2716

Pre-k – 2d grade: 931
Grades 3-5: 631
Grades 6-8: 553
Grades 9-10: 323
Grades 11-12: 269



CT Department of Children and Families

Runaway incidents of children/youth in DCF care

2009 Total: 1,807

2008 Total: 1,600

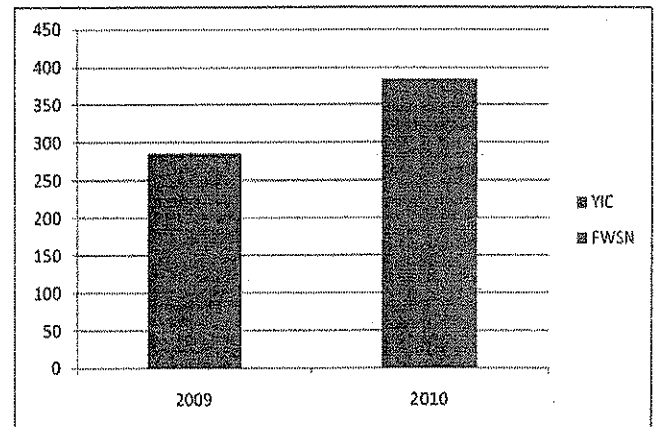
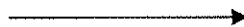
Minors as victims of prostitution reported to DCF: 61
(2008-2010)

CT Court Support Services Division

Jan 2010-Dec 2010 Runaways (unique clients):

FWSN: 313

YIC: 71



National Crime Information Center (NCIC)

Active runaway cases on 10/20/08: 236

Purged runaway records for 2008: 4,300

